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Intergroup Relations: Its Linguistic and Communicative Parameters

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IT IS not difficult to argue that language and communication processes are a core element of the social psychology of intergroup relations (Clément, 1996; Giles & Reid, 2004; Gudykunst, 1986; Lambert, 1967); indeed, they are integral constituents of our group identities (Cargile, Giles, & Clément, 1996) and what differentiates us from other relevant outgroups. However, such a case has not always been easy to make, although it is clearly evident in a plethora of aspects of our communicative lives, including dress styles, cosmetics, marches, vigils, festivals, websites, music, etc. Language and communication received their first sustained attention in the group dynamics tradition, particularly with reference to the development of social comparison and dissonance theories (Festinger, 1954). Nevertheless, much of this early work conceptualized language as nothing more than a vehicle for (intra)group and psychological processes, notably decision making and leadership (e.g. Bales, 1956). The social context of group behavior was all but absent, and language was treated very much as a functional property of group life. However, this began to change in the 1970s when Giles (1977, 1978) invoked social identity theory to explain the sociolinguistic phenomenon of language shifts. This work led, in part, to an elaboration of speech-

and later communication-accommodation theory (e.g. Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004; Giles & Coupland, 1991), parallel developments of ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles & Johnson, 1981, 1987), anxiety/uncertainty reduction theory (Gudykunst, 1995), and many others (e.g. Barker, Giles, & Harwood, 2004).

Core research foci include language attitudes (Bradac, Cargile, & Hallett, 2001), multilingualism (Sachdev & Bourhis, 2005), aging (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001), health (Harwood & Sparks, 2003), inter-ability communication (Fox & Giles, 1997), gender (Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003; Smith, 1985), intercultural relations (Hecht, Jackson, & Pitts, 2005), terrorism (Sparks, in press), and so on and so forth. Meanwhile, more phenomena and areas of investigation are recognizing the intergroup dimension: small group processes (Hogg & Tindale, 2005), organizational processes (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan, & Monaghan,

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2001), the mass media (Harwood, 1999; Reid, Giles, & Abrams, 2004), and the internet (Postmes & Baym, 2005). The social identity perspective has been an enormously fertile platform for understanding these processes, and many others besides, including intergroup *miscommunication* (Giles, Gallois, & Petronio, 1998). Indeed, robust work in these areas continues to this day, with developments in new phenomena and cross-fertilization with other disciplines on the rise (see Harwood & Giles, 2005).

In this Issue, Yzerbyt, Provost, and Corneille test the language attitudes of French and Belgians and find evidence for a compensation hypothesis: the higher status French are seen as linguistically more sophisticated but less warm, whereas Belgians are seen as less sophisticated, but more warm—a pattern that also obtains on meta-stereotypes. Yzerbyt et al. interpret their findings with regard to both ethnolinguistic identity theory (where evidence for compensation has been found in the past, see Giles & Coupland, 1991), and the stereotype content model which has been independently dealing with very similar phenomena.

Wright and Tropp take another staple of intergroup relations research, namely bilingualism, and place it into the novel context of intergroup contact. Wright and Tropp show that the ingroup favoring intergroup attitudes of White English-speaking children toward Latino targets are attenuated by contact with the Spanish language in the form of bilingual classroom instruction. Importantly, classrooms with similar ethnic composition do not replicate this finding—it is not contact, *per se*, but linguistic accommodation promoted by bilingualism that is associated with favorable intergroup attitudes.

Further to this, several—highly interrelated—developments have arisen in the field, at least three of which are well represented in this Special Issue. These include a shift toward understanding language and communication from a social cognitive (as opposed to motivational) perspective, the transmission of stereotypes, and the strategic uses of language for social influence and power.

Stereotype transmission is touched upon by three papers in this Special Issue. Wigboldus, Spears, and Semin's article employs self-categorization theory to explain the linguistic expectancy bias. This is the finding that behaviors that co-occur with expectations are represented in linguistically more abstract forms than expectancy inconsistent behaviors (Maass, Milesi, Zabbini, & Stahlberg, 1995). In two experiments, Wigboldus et al. provide evidence that intergroup social contexts amplify this bias. This suggests that a precondition to stereotype transmission is stereotype activation.

Maass, Cadinu, Boni, and Borini tested whether people spontaneously distort in memory their representations of stereotypic and counterstereotypic information. Maass et al. show that people transform concrete behavioral acts into abstract trait representations when those behaviors are consistent with stereotypes. Thus, from a purely social cognitive standpoint, stereotypes are likely to be maintained because people have a natural inclination to transform and remember concrete behavior in the form of stereotypes.

Ruscher, Cralley, and O'Farrell show that interpersonal closeness at initial interaction promotes the communication of shared stereotypical representations. One way of demonstrating interpersonal closeness is to find agreement, and such agreement is presumably easier to produce by discussing more stereotypical than astereotypical attributes of outgroups. This turns much of the thought on stereotype transmission on its head: interpersonal (or perhaps intragroup) relations can affect intergroup relations through the reinforcement of stereotypes.

However, stereotypes are governed by more than social cognitive and interpersonal processes and can, at least in part, be constructed by communicative processes (Henwood, Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1993). Language can be used deliberately and strategically to produce an intended effect on an audience. Elder, Sutton, and Douglas test for contextual moderators of the intergroup sensitivity effect (Hornsey & Imani, 2004)—the finding that people show more sensitivity (e.g. offense) to

outgroup than ingroup critics. Elder et al. demonstrate the essentially communicative effect of audience—the intergroup sensitivity effect obtains in private but not public contexts, and especially when criticisms of the group are made to an outgroup rather than the ingroup. This suggests that people are often highly cognizant of the strategic consequences of communicating negative information about their ingroup.

In this same vein, Hornsey, Blackwood, and O'Brien show that group advocates who use the collective 'we' are seen as better group representatives than advocates for the group than those who employed personal 'I' language—an effect that only obtained for high ingroup identifiers.

Taken together, we believe that this Special Issue provides a welcome indication of the vitality of research and theory on language, communication, and intergroup relations. The papers in this issue suggest that there are many available directions for research. Certainly the transmission of stereotypes is a hot topic, and likely to generate much debate. There is also likely to be a good deal more application of social cognitive models (e.g. self-categorization theory) to linguistic and communicative phenomena (Reid, Giles, & Harwood, 2005). Nevertheless, it is worth pointing to a future challenge. Another focus for research on communication and intergroup relations has not been represented in this issue—namely the discourse analytic tradition. Research in this vein has identified flexible and constructive uses of language, particularly in relation to racism (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1998; van Dijk, 1987) and nationalism (e.g. Billig, 1996). We believe that these more strategic aspects of intergroup communication will be incorporated in the research of experimental social psychologists. Indeed, this is indicated by some of the work reported in this Special Issue (e.g. Elder et al.; Hornsey et al.). Exactly how the social cognitive and the constructive/strategic uses of language are theoretically reconciled stands as an exciting challenge for the future.

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